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The Spanish Flag in Louisiana

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THE SPANISH FLAG IN LOUISIANA

Louisiana has the unique distinction of having had more flags—national and state—wave over her than any of her forty-seven sisters. Beginning with that of Spain she has had nine—some of them twice—of which eight may be called national and one state. Briefly, the eight are: The white banner of the Bourbons, the red and yellow of Spain, the British flag, the tricolor of the French republic, the Stars and Stripes, the lone star of the West Florida Republic, the “national flag of the independent state of Louisiana” (1861), the Confederate flag. Of course if we count the various modifications that some of these have undergone, not nine but legion will be the number. The present (Pelican) state flag was not adopted until after the Reconstruction era. Of course, after April 1862, Old Glory waved over these parts of the state within the Federal lines, and in 1865 was hoisted over it all.

Our concern, however, is chiefly with the Spanish flag. It first appeared in the present limits of Louisiana in 1541, when De Soto’s expedition rested for a few weeks in eastern Louisiana. After his death his followers bore their banner through western Louisiana, then back to the Mississippi, down which they floated to the gulf. No settlement was erected at this time, so the Spanish ensign merely waved in passing. It was not to return for over two centuries.

Iberville, in 1699 raised the Bourbon flag over the colony of Louisiana, at Biloxi, in the present state of Mississippi. The same year he discovered and named Baton Rouge, and a few years later settlements

were made in the present state of Louisiana. Doubtless La Salle had first displayed the Bourbon banner in Louisiana in 1682. He had suggested the name "Louisiane" in 1679. When in 1763, Louisiana east of the Mississippi was ceded to England, and the parts west to Spain, two banners replaced that of France: in that part of the state now known as "the Florida parishes", lying between the Mississippi and Pearl rivers, and the lakes and the state of Mississippi, the Union Jack floated, and Baton Rouge became Fort Richmond. Over the "isle of Orleans" and western Louisiana once more the flag of Spain appeared. Before long the scarlet and saffron was to supersede the British emblem in "the Florida parishes". Governor Galvez, in 1779, proceeded from New Orleans with a motley force of Spaniards, Americans, Indians, and negroes, and seized the British posts at Manchac, Baton Rouge, and Natchez.

For three short weeks in 1803, the tricolor of the French republic fluttered above the "place d'armes" in New Orleans, but appears not to have been displayed elsewhere in the colony. During this time Louisiana was transferred from Spain to France, and then Laussat, Napoleon's agent, transferred it to the United States. As the blue, white and red of the tricolor descended, it met the red, white and blue of the Stars and Stripes ascending. However, the Spanish banner continued to wave in the Florida parishes, as Spain held on to this region, as part of her province of West Florida, though Jefferson and Madison claimed it as part of the Louisiana purchase. A few years later, the discontented Anglo-Americans in the province organized a revolution, and in September, 1810, erected the "Republic of West Florida". General Philemon Thomas captured the fort at Baton Rouge, and planted upon it a blue woolen banner bearing a single silver star—the first "lone star" flag in American history. The new republic applied for annexation to the United States, but as President Madison thought it part of the Louisiana purchase, he had Governor Claiborne annex it to the territory of Orleans. So now, for the first time, appeared the present limits of Louisiana, and over it waved the Stars and Stripes.

We may note in passing that after Louisiana had seceded from the Union (January, 1861) and before she joined the Confederacy (March), her convention adopted a "national flag for the sovereign and independent state of Louisiana". This was intended to epitomize all her previous flags, and consisted of thirteen stripes of blue (4), white (6), and red (3), with a field of red containing a single yellow star.

Gift

Author

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Returning to the Spanish flag, let us see what it symbolizes in the history and civilization of Louisiana. In the "flag number" of the *National Geographic Magazine*, three Spanish flags are given—the royal standard, the naval ensign and the merchant flag. The first of these is a purple banner, bearing in the center the royal coat of arms. Two stripes of red, separated by a broader one of yellow, in which appears the national coat of arms, make up the ensign; while the merchant flag is yellow with two red stripes near the upper and lower edges. The flag borne by Columbus, or the "standard of Spain" is given as a quartering of grey and red. A red lion of Leon ramps on the grey squares, while the yellow castle of Castile appears upon the red ones. Perhaps de Soto bore this flag too, but as an Admiral he was more likely to have had the naval ensign. Be that as it may, all of these colors are symbolized in Louisiana.

The grey is represented by the Spanish moss (*barbe espagnole*) which droops so picturesquely from her cypresses and live-oaks. It also typifies the fogs of the Father of Waters, to say nothing of the jackets of the many soldiers Louisiana sent into the Confederate army. The flowers of her pomegranates, her hibiscus, her verbena and her roses suggest the red of the banner of Spain. Redder still is the ardent, patriotic blood of the Louisianians, whether they be Creoles or of Anglo-American extraction. Perhaps some of that red blood is nourished by the delicious "redfish courtbouillon" which the housewives of Louisiana know so well how to prepare. Golden oranges, the yellow jasmine, the acacia flower, the yellow harvest of the rice fields, the golden return from her sugar plantations reproduce the yellow of the flag, as does the brilliant southern sunshine. But the golden, openhearted hospitality of Louisiana is the true meaning of the yellow. Even the royal standard can find its prototype in Louisiana. Not merely the purple of the sugarcane, or the lavender of the water-hyacinth, but the regal beauty of the daughters of Louisiana is what it represents.

Apart from metaphor, what does the Spanish flag stand for in Louisiana? Such names as Almonaster in philanthropy, Unzaga and Miro in government, Gayarré in letters, Peñalvert y Cardenas in religion, Bermudez in law, Quintero in journalism, and Matas in surgery, indicate some of the fields in which the Spanish element has borne a notable part in the development of Louisiana. Besides "peninsular" Spaniards, many came to Louisiana from other parts of Spanish America and many continue to come, and find a welcome. The "isleños", or Canary islanders, began coming in 1778, and their descendants still

abound. After the slave insurrection of 1791, many of both Spanish and French blood fled from Santo Domingo to Louisiana. On the map of the state appear many such place names as Iberia, Feliciana, de Soto, Galvez, and Segura. Both the name "cabildo" and the building which bears it commemorate the Spanish régime in New Orleans. In this old governmental office are found many specimens of Spanish art, letters, and government.

Like other Latin countries, Spain drew her law largely from Roman sources. This was transferred to her colonies, and in Louisiana it easily merged with the existing French law and the local ordinances. All of these, revised in the light of the *Code Napoléon* were adapted by Edward Livingston and his associates to Anglo-American jurisprudence to form the Civil Code of 1825, which is the basis of the law of Louisiana.

The "isleños" have developed a distinctive dialect and folklore of their own, which was first seriously studied by the late Professor Alcée Fortier.

From this hasty sketch it is evident that the Spanish influence has been an important one in Louisiana. It is not surprising that New Orleans has always had an extensive commerce with Hispanic America. Today this trade is growing rapidly, especially with Mexico, Central America, Panama and the islands of the gulf and Caribbean. It is also well-known that previous to 1860 filibusters, such as Walker and Lopez made New Orleans their rendezvous.

Louisiana State University, Tulane University, and the other educational institutions of the state draw many students from Hispanic America. The Audubon Sugar School, of the State University, attracts so many, that a few years ago it was found expedient to issue a bulletin in Spanish.

In the promotion of Pan-Americanism, Louisiana should and doubtless will play an important part. Even today, she has sent teachers to many Hispanic American countries, and her leading higher institutions have Hispanic Americans on their faculties. In the great international crisis of today, there are no more loyal and ardent patriots in the world than those of Louisiana; and amongst these none rank higher than those of Spanish descent. Their blood is as red and their virtue as purely golden as the colors of the banner of old Spain.

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